DOCUMENT RESUME

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ABSTRACT

This leaflet discusses alcohol and other drug abuse prevention for individuals with learning disabilities. It defines learning disabilities and outlines factors that place people with learning disabilities at increased risk for alcohol and other drug use. The guide emphasizes that alcohol and drug abuse prevention efforts should include information specific to the person's disability. It offers suggestions to improve prevention program access for people with learning disabilities and to bring about positive interactions. It identifies five myths about individuals with learning disabilities and dispels them with factual information. The guide concludes with a list of six printed resources and eight organizational resources. (JDD)

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A Look at Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention and...

LEARNING DISABILITIES

Learning disabilities are disorders manifested by significant difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and mathematical abilities. The primary problems do not involve collecting information (as in sensory disabilities) but in interpreting, translating, or recalling information collected. Learning disabilities are intrinsic to the person, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span.

Learning disabilities range from mild to very severe. They affect between 5 to 10% of the population. There are many types of learning disabilities. Some examples include:

- dyslexia: severe problems with reading;
- dysgraphia: severe problems with writing;
- dysphasia: severe problems with speaking;
- dyscalcula: severe problems doing math.

The Implications of Alcohol and Other Drug Use

People with learning disabilities are more prone to misunderstand alcohol and other drug education and prevention materials, placing them at greater risk for injuries and other consequences of abuse. People with learning disabilities may begin to use alcohol and other drugs through peer pressure in an effort to gain acceptance and recognition when other avenues appear to be unavailable.

Communication difficulties experienced by people with learning disabilities often are not understood or appreciated by others. These misunderstandings compound feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and rejection. Unsuccessful peer group and school experiences can hasten the use of alcohol and other drugs in order to cope with these feelings.

Alcohol and other drug abuse prevention efforts should include information specific to the person's disability. For example, the following points might be emphasized in discussions with a person who has a learning disability:

- Even small amounts of alcohol can be harmful in combination with prescription drugs.
- There is a difference between taking medication and using alcohol and other drugs to deal with emotions and difficult situations. It is important to learn effective ways to deal with stress and other problems and not use alcohol and other drugs to do so.
- The use of alcohol and other drugs can interfere with learning and developing effective social skills, which could increase feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement.
- Using alcohol and other drugs can exacerbate difficulties which may exist in planning, concentration, and information processing speed.

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Suggestions to Improve Access and Positive Interactions

Processing difficulties often interfere with learning. Extra time may be required to learn a certain skill. Once learned, however, there is no relationship between a learning disability and performance of the task.

Occasional inattentiveness, distraction, or loss of eye contact by the person with a learning disability is not unusual. Do not be concerned or offended, it is unintentional.

Some information processing problems may affect social skills, such as an unconventional or complete lack of response. Do not confuse this with rudeness.

A person with a learning disability sometimes has difficulty interpreting social cues (e.g., facial expressions, voice tone, and gestures). Accordingly, he or she may respond in an inappropriate manner. Again, do not confuse this with rudeness.

If future contact with a person with a learning disability is warranted, discuss openly the preferred way to communicate. This may be in writing or by phone.

Have your educational and promotional materials reviewed to see that they are available in various sensory modes and accessible to people with communication problems.

ETC.

This space has been provided for you. Make notes or write questions that you want to ask resource organizations or agencies.

REMEMBER

ASK AND LISTEN!

A person with a disability is the expert about his or her disability.

MYTHS & **FACTS**

MYTH: *Learning disability is just another name for mental retardation.*

FACT: Both conditions interfere with the ability to learn. Mental retardation, however, involves a generalized, lowered intelligence while learning disability is specific to only one form of information processing. Learning disabilities, however, may occur in combinations.

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MYTH: *A learning disability affects only academic achievement and disappears as a child matures.*

FACT: A learning disability affects many aspects of a person's life such as driving, team participation, and human relations. Although its impact can be lessened somewhat as a person develops and learns to compensate, learning disability is usually a life-long issue.

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MYTH: *It is impossible to be both physically disabled and learning disabled.*

FACT: Physical disabilities and learning disabilities occur independently of one another. A person with a physical disability is as likely to have a learning disability as a nondisabled person.

MYTH: *Learning disabilities are the result of other handicapping conditions or social influences.*

FACT: Although learning disabilities may occur at the same time as other handicapping conditions (e.g., sensory impairment, emotional disturbance) or external influences (e.g., cultural differences, poor instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences.

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MYTH: *Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction constitute a learning disability.*

FACT: By themselves these do not constitute a learning disability, although they may exist with a learning disability.

A Resource: *A Special Message: Project Oz, A Comprehensive Drug Education Curriculum for Learning Disabled and Behavior Disordered Populations.* A drug education and prevention program, now available for grades one through twelve. The price list and ordering information can be obtained by contacting Project Oz, 201 E. Grove Street, 2nd floor, Bloomington, IL 61701. Phone: (309) 827-0377.

For More INFORMATION

Organizations

Center on Postsecondary Education for Students with Learning Disabilities
University of Connecticut
Box 464, 249 Glenbrook Road
Storrs, CT 06269
(203) 486-4036

Learning Disability Association of America
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(412) 341-1515

National Center for Learning Disabilities
99 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10016
(212) 687-7211

National Network of Learning Disabled Adults
800 N. 82nd Street, Suite F2
Scottsdale, AZ 85257
(602) 941-5112

Orton Dyslexia Society
Chester Building, Suite 382
8600 LaSalle Road
Baltimore, MD 21204
(301) 296-0232

Government Agency

Administration on Developmental Disabilities
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 336D
Washington, DC 20201
(202) 245-2890

Community Contacts

Many of the listed organizations have state and local chapters.

To locate additional resources contact your state Governor's Committee of People with Disabilities

or obtain a State Resource Sheet from

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities
PO Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
(703) 893-6061 • (800) 999-5599 • (703) 893-8614 TDD

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Mandell, W., and Nollie, P.W. (1985). Hyperactive teens more likely to drink. *U.S. Journal of Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 9(12), 19.

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This information was developed as a part of a set of materials on alcohol and other drug abuse prevention and disability. Other documents on specific topics are available upon request.
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